10: d'Orleans--332 [2] T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 346, 524, 778, 793

"Outside the principal building, in the courtyard of the pagoda, [LSS: the pagoda of Ouate Maï in Luang Prabang] are a series of ongmong, or small buildings which contain the statues of the gods; pyramids (Tâte) containing the bones of prominent bonzes or members of the Royal Family, and plaster bells like the lotus flower, behind all these buildings, hidden among the trees, being the houses of the bonzes, whose pupils we remark at play, the game at which they play, with a hollow ball made out of bamboo canes twisted together, being one which requires great skill."

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10: d'Orleans--352 [2] T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 524, 527

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]

"There are also certain games played one of these being very much like that known to us as 'questions and answers,' while there is another played with bits of paper, which resembles that of 'mother goose.' "

10: d'Orleans--370-372 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos-1-2
116, 524, 533, 584

[LSS: in Paklay] "In the evening the Siamese lieutenant invites us to a particularly original fête. Upon a small terrace in front of our verandah sit a dozen young girls, their [371] busts draped in gold-thread scarves of native make. Opposite them a dozen young men take their places. A man carrying a Laotian organ, which he has difficulty in setting up, follows them. The pipes of the organ are so long--nearly 14 feet--that he is finally obliged to cut a hole in the roof, but the damage can be easily repaired.

We are about to assist at a good game of repartee, between the men and the women, a sort of literary joust.

Each camp has its champion. On one side a young man, with a rather expressive face, contorts his facial muscles so as to produce every sort of mimicry. Opposite is an old woman with a wrinkled and pockmarked skin, though her ugliness down not prevent her, from possessing the gift of quick retort. The organ plays continually on a grave key in a sort of bass, while the persons present accompany it by clapping their hands at certain measures.

When the woman rejects her questioner's propositions,the latter takes two small candles, made of a little wax coiled round a few threads, holds them fixed with the thumb nail, and gesticulates, turning his hands and moving his arms in passes like those of a hypnotiser. To these movements correspond certain shruggings of the shoulders, contractions of the mouth, distortions of the nose and wrigglings in consonance with the

measure of the organ music. When the grimaces are funny the women mark their satisfaction by bursting into peals of laughter.

Of the group of young men some interrupt to support or excite their champion, or they repeat a refrain in chorus. It is generally some popular phrase, [372] the meaning of which is not clear to either the Siamese lieutenant or the interpreter. There is also a series of exclamations, which one repeats twice, these cries corresponding to our shouts of encouragement: 'Keep it up,' 'don't flinch,' 'steady,' and the like: Aou'. aou! aoua! ioua! pemma! sempa! satna!

Sometimes the singing is in crescendo time and the singer seems to be in a hurry. The company becomes excited, encouraging and urging him on. A brass bowl is continually passed round, flowing over with tchoum-tchoum. The animation becomes greater and greater and the party breaks up amid a general hubbub. [LSS: for the text of some of the dialogue, see Laotians, category 539, p. 372-373.] "

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Sports and games. These are widespread in Laos.

"Boxing has fervent disciples there, as does flat-handed wrestling. Some of the champions have remarkable professional skill, agility and cleverness which never lose their elegance.

"The Laotians play with balls and shuttlecocks, but without using either their hands or rackets. Any other part of the body, for example, from the foot to the head, may be used to return a ball or shuttlecock. Nearly all young people play this extremely graceful game, which requires great suppleness, a quick eye and perfect ease of movement, which in this game should be neither jerky nor violent (1).

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(1) This game is also played in Burma, whence it was doubtless imported into Laos. The ball is made of large-mesh rattan latticework and is spherical in form with a diameter of ten to twelve centimeters. The shuttlecock is half-spherical. It is of similar construction, covered with cloth and provided with feathers along the edge. (Author's note.)

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"Like all Orientals, Laotians have a passion for games of chance in any form. This is the race's only real vice, and the French administration is obliged to maintain active surveillance over it.

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"A form of chess, more complicated than the game played in Europe, is widely played, and a few players are highly reputed for their perfect grasp of the game." (Le Laos français.)

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Celebrations and festivals. In addition to the legal public holidays, the temperament of the Laotians leads them to celebrate a great many others, for the most diverse and the most futile reasons. In principle, the Laotian makes no expenditures to ameliorate his daily fare and the pleasures of the table, as far as choice foods go, are indifferent to him. This does not prevent him, however, from organizing celebrations among relatives, friends and neighbors which anyone can attend without being specially invited. This custom of giving public festivities, or "Ngans" to use the native term, where everyone eats and drinks, has a good time, jokes and makes love, shows the friendly side of the Laotian character and the extreme sociability of the people. Those whose personal resources are too limited to cover the expenses of a "Ngan" either join with others in similar straits or go skirmishing through the city or village in search of the money, food, brandy and wax needed to accomplish their plan.

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village and those of ancestors. Prayers for the dead are said, and 782
when they are over the head and feet of a goat, crude clay statuettes 769
representing two men, two buffalo and two oxen, and numerous wax
candles are placed on a raft made of banana trees. The raft is
launched full into the current of a river while men collect on the
banks and fire salvos of shots and shoot off fireworks.

The musical instruments of the Thais are the "Kene" and [240] 534
a kind of clarinet with two tubes, reinforced by gongs and tom-toms.

Their songs are not at all noisy and are much more like mono- 538
tonous chants.

The Thais have a very characteristic game, and this is the game 524
of the "inexhaustible jar." A jar of rice beer is placed on the floor
of a house and five bamboo tubes stuck in it to serve as straws. Five 273
men take positions around the jar, and each of them puts a tube in
his mouth. Into each of the jars, and above a kind of porous stopper
made of pressed paddy husks, water is poured by means of an ox
horn with a hole in the end. At a given signal both men and women
begin to suck conscientiously while the contents of the ox horn are
poured into each jar three times in succession. The ones who empty
their jar first win, and the losers have to drink the contents of ten
horns of water poured over what is left of the beer in their jar.

The Thai beer does not have a bad taste, and its alcoholic
strength is equivalent to that of hard cider, which it closely resembles
in flavor. Although the additions of water decrease the beverage's
percentage of alcohol it nevertheless produces a slight intoxication,
due primarily to the speed with which it is sucked through the straw.
But the inebriety never degenerates into a quarrel, and provokes
nothing but laughter, songs and unadulterated merriment.

Who would believe that the Thais have the custom of throwing 527
"confetti"? Nothing is more true, however, for in the celebrations
at the end of harvest, which take place in December or January,
the merrymakers throw cotton seeds mixed with paddy, with husks,
and sometimes also with ashes.

389 the rockets are naturally in proportion to the size of the latter. For large rockets, they are made up of a kind of broad, triangular ladder, the top of which is leaned against a tree top.

524 527 Hot air balloons. In northern Laos, balloons are constructed out of paper which is either made locally or imported from China. They are cylindro-spherical in shape and a little gondola of rattan cane is suspended from them by a cotton thread. In the gondola there is an oil cup filled with lard and provided with two or three cotton wicks, and these are lit in order to keep the air in the balloons hot for a given length of time.

Since they are generally launched in the evening at the time of the great holiday of the twelfth month (October-November), the absence of wind makes it possible to follow their aerial course as long as the cotton wicks continue to give off light.

[469] [Illustration at top of page]

CHAPTER X

1. PRESENT ROUTES OF COMMUNICATION BY LAND

487 We have already dealt in Chapter II with the routes of communication by river, and so shall deal here only with land routes (1).

(1) See Appendix XXVII.

In Laos they are of three kinds:

1. The cart roads negotiable by ox-carts and wagons;

2. The mule tracks over which elephants, horses, mules and oxen can pass.

3. The paths or even mere trails which can be used only by travelers on foot.

481 [470] As a consequence of the ingrained habit which both animals and people have of always walking in single file, the roads of Laos, like those of many other lands, are reduced to the width of a path which is marked on the ground either by the trampling animals and men, or by two deep ruts into which the wheels of carts sink. In the forest, depending on how wide and how high a path has been cleared through the undergrowth, a road may be practicable for elephants, men on horseback, oxen or only for travelers on foot.

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Then the royal retinue proceeds to the That Luang where the king must spend the night in a sala. He is accompanied by his ministers and in principle may not leave until they come and fetch him.

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On the morning of the fifteenth day, the king, carried by his guards, goes to make his offerings to the bonzes, and the whole day is devoted to public rejoicing, of which one form deserves to be mentioned. It is the game of the Thi khi.

Its origin, so far as we know at present, remains obscure. The Pra Lak Pra Lam tells us that Indra and Rama played Thi Khi together, and that since that day it has been played at Vientiane.

Let us observe that the game was unknown at Luang Prabang. It was imported from the south. Tradition required that it be played on horseback, when it was played like polo.

At the present time it is played on foot with a stick with the end bent over like a crosier and a ball the size [47] of a child's head and is similar to hockey. There are two opposing sides, the office-holders and the people. The latter should in principle win two victories out of three games. The game has no rules, there is no umpire and no limit to the ground played on. Sometimes the ball goes off into the shrubbery, and all the players go and look for it. Only a hypothetical line indicates the limit of the enemy side.

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The feasts of Vat Inpeng and of Vat Ong Tu merely repeat those of Vat Simuong and That Luang.

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THE SECULAR CEREMONIES

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The Sou Khouan can be considered as the transition between the purely religious ceremonies and the secular feasts.

Actually Sou Khouan means "call and reception of the soul." The Laotian has a profound belief in the transmigration of the soul. According to him, the human body is inhabited by thirty-two khouan (spirits) each of whom presides over the function of a member, an organ or an intellectual faculty.

When a human being dies, all of the thirty-two souls leave his body. According to the merits which have been acquired, they go either to the heaven of the gods, or to the province of the dead. Certain beings who have died in an abnormal manner, by suicide, drowning, etc., become wandering souls. They are to be feared, because they return to earth in order to torment the living, and one must make numerous sacrifices to them.

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525 GAMBLING--laying of wagers on games, athletic contests, and spectacles; betting; lotteries; special gambling devices (e.g., roulette wheels); calculation of odds (e.g., bookmakers, parimutuel machines); informal gambling; gaming houses and their operation; gambling as a method of finance (e.g., government lotteries, church bingo games, hospital sweepstakes, club slot machines); specialists (e.g., gamblers, croupiers); prevalence of and attitudes toward gambling; restrictions and regulations; etc. See also:

Debts 426
Speculation 455
Horse racing 641
Illicit gambling establishments 648
Conception and manipulation of luck and chance 777

10: d'Orleans--300-301 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 436, 455, 525, 651, 177.52 Siam
636.52

"In addition to the forced labour, there is, the capitation tax, the opium tax, and the monopoly of the tchoum-tchoum, but the monopoly of gaming, which is the source of large revenue in Siam itself, has been suppressed here by the Siamese as being immoral. It is the same with the speculation upon the money exchange, which is not yet resorted to in Luang Prabang. In the valley of Ménam, more especially, the money in use is composed of earthenware counters, the circulation of which is suspended or the value altered by a Government decree, large profits being thus secured in very arbitrary fashion. Another source of profit [301] for the treasury of Luang Prabang is the produce of the customs, there being a tax of three per cent. upon the merchandise and of a basket of salt upon each canoe, which comes up from the south with a load of it."

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Tribal Tai
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s the long pirogue, and the jockeys are the oarsmen. Nor will it be n vain to remark that, as in our races, heavy wagers are often laid by the owners and the lovers of this kind of sport.

Thais or Phou-Thais. The Thais or Phou-Thais are divided into four distinct groups. These are:

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1. The Khao-Thais (white);
2. The Dam-Thais (black);
3. The Deng-Thais (red);
4. The Neua-Thais (northern).

The Khao-Thais are the result of marriages between Chinese men and Dam-Thai women, or vice versa, although the former case is the most frequent. They do not form large agglomerations, but only isolated family groups in the midst of the surrounding population. They are found only in the northern part of the Sib-Song-Chau-Thais, a territory which is dependent on Laos from the ethnographic point of view but administratively attached to Tonkin.

The following is what is known of their origin: [229] [Illustration] [230] [Blank page] [231]

"Around 1600 a rebel Chinese leader assembled a few partisans, set sail from Canton and landed at Haiphong. From there he went on to Bac-Ninh, continually increasing the number of his men. At Bac-Ninh the rebel leader received an envoy from the king of Annam, who asked him to help put down the Thais and the Muongs of the Black River. The Chinese leader accepted, and after leaving Bac-Ninh he went to Lao-Kay, from which point he soon entered the province of the Sib-Sing-Chau-Thais. After defeating the Thais and the Muongs he was given this province out of gratitude for his help. His troops, worn out by the campaign, settled in the country and lost no time in marrying Thai women. It was from such unions that the white Thais were born" (1).

(1) E. Picanon, op. cit. [Le Laos français, Paris, 1901.]

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Dam-Thais and Deng-Thais. These two varieties have a common origin and belong to the same family (2). The different names which

(2) Thais are found in nearly all of Laos, where they are scattered among the Laotian population. They are particularly numerous in the Hua-Pahn, where they are in the majority in certain muongs.